

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for the preparation of beads having a crosslinked inorganic matrix with a size controlled in the millimeter range, ~~characterized in that it consists in~~ which comprises preparing gelled beads by pouring a suspension comprising a precursor of the inorganic matrix and an alginate dropwise into a solution of a polyvalent cation salt, the pH of which is less than 3, and ~~in~~ crosslinking the precursor of the inorganic matrix by a sol-gel process.

2. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the pH is less than 2.

3. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the alginate is an alkali metal alginate.

4. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the beads are maintained in the reaction medium for a time of 1 hour to 24 hours for the gelling of the alginate.

5. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is an inorganic compound capable of crosslinking by a sol-gel process chosen from inorganic compounds which have hydroxyl groups bonded to a metal when they are in solution.

6. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 5, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is a compound capable of gelling according to the polymerization of molecular entities (PME) mechanism.

7. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 6, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the precursor is an alkali metal silicate.

8. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 5, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is a compound capable of gelling according to the destabilization of colloidal solutions (DCS) mechanism.

9. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 8, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is an alumina of boehmite type or a colloidal silica.

10. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in ~~either of claims 6 and 7~~ claim 6, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is crosslinked by an alkali metal fluoride during a stage following the gelling of the

alginate, the polyvalent cation salt used for the gelling of the alginate having a cation other than calcium.

11. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 10, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the crosslinking of the inorganic matrix is carried out while keeping the beads suspended with gentle stirring for a time of between 6 and 72 hours.

12. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in ~~either of claims 8 and 9~~ claim 8, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is crosslinked under the effect of the pH of the reaction medium during the gelling of the alginate.

13. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 12, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the reaction medium, comprising the beads formed by the gelled alginate and the crosslinked inorganic matrix, is maintained at ambient temperature for a time of between 1 and 24 hours.

14. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein it is carried out at a temperature between 10°C and 60°C.

15. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the polyvalent cation salt used for the gelling of the alginate is chosen from salts for which the anion is a halide, a nitrate or a sulfate and for which the cation is an alkaline-earth metal, transition metal or noble metal cation.

16. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein at least one additive chosen from pigments and organic coloring agents for cosmetic use, kaolin powder, clays, coloring agents and pore-forming agents is added to the suspension comprising the precursor of the inorganic matrix and the alginate.

17. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the beads obtained after crosslinking the inorganic matrix are extracted from the reaction medium by filtration.

18. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in claim 17, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the beads separated by filtration are washed with water or with a basic aqueous solution at a pH < 8.

19. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in ~~either of claims 17 and 18~~ claim 17, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the beads separated by filtration are subjected to drying in the air, optionally after having been washed with acetone or with alcohol.

20. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in ~~either of claims 17 and 18~~ claim 17, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the beads separated from the reaction medium by filtration are dried by lyophilization.

21. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in ~~either of claims 17 and 18~~
~~claim 17, characterized in that~~ wherein the beads extracted from the reaction
medium by filtration are washed with acetone or with alcohol and are then placed in
a solution comprising an alkoxide of a metal diluted in an anhydrous organic solvent.

22. (Currently Amended) The process as claimed in ~~either of claims 17 and 18~~
~~claim 17, characterized in~~ wherein the beads separated from the reaction medium by
filtration are subjected to calcination at a temperature of between 400°C and 800°C.

23. (Currently Amended) A material obtained by a process as claimed in claim
1, formed of beads suspended in an aqueous medium, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein
the beads have a diameter of 0.5 mm to a few mm and are ~~composed~~ comprised of
a hydrated matrix of gelled alginate, a crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide
of the polyvalent cation of the salt used as gelling agent.

24. (Currently Amended) A bead obtained by a process as claimed in ~~either of~~
~~claims 19 and 20~~ claim 19, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein it the bead is ~~composed~~
comprised of an alginate network, a crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide of
the cation originating from the agent for gelling the alginate.

25. (Currently Amended) A bead obtained by a process as claimed in claim
21, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein it the bead is formed of a core ~~composed~~
comprised of an alginate network, a crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide of

the cation originating from the agent for gelling the alginate and of a surface layer of metal oxide or hydroxide.

26. (Currently Amended) A bead obtained by a process as claimed in claim 22, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein it is composed the bead is comprised of a crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide of the cation originating from the agent for gelling the alginate, is porous and is devoid of organic compounds.

27. (Currently Amended) The bead as claimed in ~~one of claims 24 to 26~~ claim 24, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein it additionally comprises at least one compound chosen from pigments and organic coloring agents for cosmetic use, kaolin powder, clays and coloring agents.